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News reporters cannot wear two hats

Stansfield Turner, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was in the Twin Cities this week to promote the agency's new image of openness with the American public.

He was also promoting the use of professors, clerics and newspaper reporters as spies. "I think it is cynical and disloyal" for news reporters to refuse to share information with the CIA, Turner told staff members of the Minneapolis morning and evening newspapers.

Turner is about half correct. Certainly any reporter who digs up information about activities that threaten the security of the United States has a duty to tell someone. It's hard to imagine any reporter withholding such information; most, in fact, would be inclined to publish at least part of it.

But Turner is wrong — for a couple of

reasons — about actually using reporters as undercover agents.

First, it would be extremely dangerous for all newsmen if an alien government ever caught a reporter acting as a spy. Reporters are highly visible and particularly vulnerable by the very nature of their work. If their probing questions were interpreted as spying, their life expectancy would be short.

Second, a conscientious news reporter cannot serve two masters. A reporter who is privy to special information through an official connection with the CIA would always have difficulty deciding how much to tell. If the reporter erred on the side of secrecy, the public would be short-changed; if the error went the other way, government secrets would be compromised. It just won't work.